



## ISSUE 8: SEPTEMBER , 2019

### Letter from the Editor:

Brothers and Sisters!

This past month has been extraordinary. With my return to Michigan I was excited to attend the *Band the Bars Conference* that was hosted by MAPS in Lansing at the end of August. There I had the pleasure of speaking alongside Ben Turk during the first session for a comparison between the 2016 and 2018 National Events hosted by JLS. Following that I was able to meet U.S. Representative Rashida Tâlib at her town hall, she is a representative that is unbought and unbosssed when it comes to the issues that effect impoverished communities and communities of color, including dismantling the prison-industrial-slave-complex.

Many may be surprised to learn that I've never visited New York, but that never turned into a first this past week as I was invited to the Voting Rights Symposium hosted by the Brennan Center at NYU. There convened activists, organizers and elected officials committed to the restoration of voting rights to those impacted by mass incarceration. The issue of felony disenfranchisement has reached national significance and it's important that we seize this opportunity. I'm honored to have been in the room and no the first pages of this issue you'll find my report back from this event.

Criminal justice reform is an issue that has now reached the presidential debate stage with more candidates introducing more comprehensive proposals than ever. Within this issue you will find a comparison between the two earliest released criminal justice reform propposalss of Senators Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden. Please send me a note with any responses you may have to these candidates propposalss, I would love to know your thoughts.

This month has been rewarding, yet challenging. I am motivated by the challenges that my inside supports overcome on a daily basis behind the wall. Your strength gives me strength so please, stay strong. I welcome your ideas and suggestions as we continue on this path towards rights restoration, this New Suffrage Movement is your movement, it cannot move without you! Stay engaged, stay involved and stay strong.

Please remembr that there has been an address change from Seattle to Detroit. Sawarimi has moved to the to Motor City and so has the the production of this newsletter so please address all mail for myself and the Right2Vote Report to:

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In Solidarity,  
Amani Sawari  
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These are the NATIONAL DEMANDS of the men and women in federal, immigration and state prisons:

- 1.Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
- 2.An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
- 3.Rescission of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
- 4.Rescission of the Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to death by incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
- 5.An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in Southern states.
- 6.An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and Brown humans.
- 7.No denial of access to rehabilitation programs for imprisoned humans at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
- 8.State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
- 9.Reinstatement of Pell grant eligibility to prisoners in all US states and territories.
- 10.Recognition of voting rights for all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees and so-called "ex-felons." Their votes must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count!



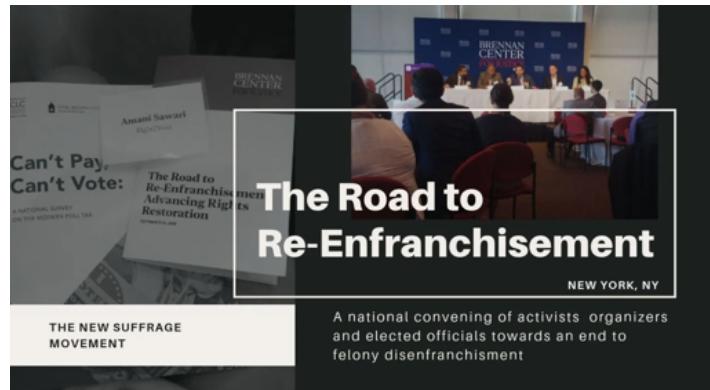
- On August 18 Sanders released his presidential Criminal Justice Reform plan during his town hall in South Carolina
- On August 21 the Southourn Coalition for Social Justice Released a report on the impact of felony disenfranchsiment in North Carolina
- ACA 6 has passed the Assembly Floor and is now moving to the Senate side of the California State Legislature

# MOVEMENT MOVES

PEOPLE | POSITIONS | POWER

## Advancing Rights Restoration: Where Should Civil Rights Stop?

Amani Sawari | September 13, 2019 | [www.sawarimi.org](http://www.sawarimi.org)



This week was called by Jailhouse Lawyers Speak (JLS) to be Unchain the Vote Week focused on bringing attention to the unconstitutional, dehumanizing act of felony disenfranchisement that plagues 48 of the 50 United States. During this week outside organizers hosted and attended events in solidarity with inside organizers' call. One of the events I attended was the Brennan Center's Voting Rights Symposium, The Road to Re-Enfranchisement: Advancing Rights Restoration. The event was a closed invite only collaboration between New York and New Jersey attended by aligned organizations across the country including grassroots organizers like Initiate Justice, Emancipation Initiative and Millions for Prisoners (all of which are apart of the Right2Vote Campaign) as well as larger organizations like Demos, the Vera Institute and Common Cause. The Brennan Center created space or people across the country to share ideas in favor of ending felony disenfranchisement as well as to evaluate the outcomes from Florida's Amendment 4 that passed in November. The event included three panels, a keynote speech by New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy and a final closed session for impacted persons.

### What is the legislative intent of the law?

I appreciated the Brennan Center's bringing together voices from a wide range of perspectives as panelists to speak on the issue. The first panel, How to Bring Everyone Along, included Anthony Dixon Director of Community Engagement for the Parole Preparation Project (NY); Arthur Rizer Director of Criminal Justice and Civil Liberties for R Street Institute (KY); Pastor Jim Liske, founder of Movement.org; and Sarah Walker, founder of the Minnesota Second Chance Coalition. This panel focused on the importance of making sure that everyone's voice is heard within our society regardless of their past. Dixon described voting rights as, "the epicenter of all rights", emphasizing the fact that without voting rights there is no citizenship. This is especially true for one living in a democracy that is founded on the principal of every citizen's voice being heard. The lack of one having the privilege of making contributions on the legislation that governs them equates to a complete lack of citizenship. With this new understanding for

many residents living in this democracy the title "citizen" is just an empty label. Incarcerated citizens in 48 states, paroled citizens in 25 states, citizens on probation in 23 states, and convicted felons in up to 8 states that are without voting rights are essentially not citizens at all. This population of invisible citizens equate to more than 6 million people that are not equipped with the rights that would validate their citizenship within a democracy. The panel posed these questions to everyone in the room, "What is the legislative intent of the law" and "Should civil rights stop at the prison door?" When we ask ourselves these questions there is where we will find our validation or lack thereof for felony disenfranchisement.



The Brennan Center did an incredible job highlighting the experiences of impacted people by not only inviting them to the conference but by also ensuring that they were on center stage. Every panel included someone who was formally incarcerated and questions were directed toward them with a focus on how restored voting rights had a positive impact on their reentry journey. The second panel, Watch Out for Carve Outs, included Rachel J. Anderson, General Council for the office of the Nevada Attorney General where legislation recently re-enfranchised 70,000 formally incarcerated people; Alexes Harris a professor from the University of Washington; Bruce Reilly Deputy Director for Voice of the Experienced, a now robust outside organization that was initiated during his incarceration at Angola Prison and Andrew Warren from the 13th Judicial Circuit State Attorney.

This discussion focused on cautioning organizers of the types of compromises that legislators attempt to make when deciding whether to pass restoration legislation. The most popular types of carve out, which were also included in Amendment 4, are populations with homicide or sexual assault convictions. As an advocate for full enfranchisement, the type of crime that someone is convicted of should not play any factor in their voter eligibility. The carve out discussion was unsettling for me because it seemed as though there was an acceptance by some for the necessity of carving out certain populations in order to save others. There was certainly a divide in the room, people who saw carve outs as a strategy toward achieving a larger goal and others who viewed carve outs as a lazy compromise.

## Should civil rights stop at the prison door?

An effective resolution to the issue of carve outs would be, organizers changing their initial ask. Many states are introducing bills to restore voting rights to formally incarcerated populations, those on probation and parole, with the hope of it passing through congress as is. However, many controversial issues, especially in within the realm of criminal justice reform never pass as is, there will most likely be some type of compromise. In negotiations, knowing that we want a lower price for an item we will always ask for much less than we're willing to pay hoping that the seller will meet us in the middle. With that understanding, we need to ask legislators much more than they're willing to give in order for them to meet us in the middle. If we ask for partial restoration, our middle ground will have carve outs. Those carve outs will be difficult for us to restore in years to come and it could take much longer than we expect in order to restore the rights of those populations.

In order to address this I suggest we introduce bills for full enfranchisement with the restoration of prisoners voting rights along with that of those on probation and parole, using Vermont and Maine as examples. This way we present our end goal, the intent of the people and any compromise would most likely be partial restoration of released populations without any carve outs. When we ask for more we will get more and the final end goal is full restoration so why not ask for it? The 10th demand of the National Prison Strike, for which many were inspired, called for the rights of prisoners to be restored so rather than going piece meal we need to get discussions happening in our state legislatures now. Our country is more focused on criminal justice reform than it has ever been, now is the time to capitalize on this moment.

## NJ Governor Murphy gives keynote speech

Governor Murphy's keynote speech embraced the idea of restoring voting rights to people on probation and parole in New Jersey, saying that he called on the legislature to introduce the bill in January. Congress, in partnership with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice answered the call with an even greater ask, a complete end to felony disenfranchisement all together. Murphy did not address that ask of organizers during his keynote. He praised New Jersey as a leading state as, "a proving ground for progressive ideals" with the strongest gun laws in the nation, willing to provide government funding to dreamers seeking a higher education. The Governor called felony disenfranchisement, "a needless prohibition that prevents successful integration".

In alignment with Governor, the Brennan Center's did not publicly endorse prisoners voting rights being restored but they did not dismiss it and embraced conversations about full enfranchisement by panelists during the third panel, Next Generation Fights, panelists included Justin Allen, a community organizer with Millions for Prisoners' New Mexico Chapter; Juan Cartagena, President of the Latino Justice PRLDEF; Patty Kuderer Washington State Senator from the 48th Legislative District who introduced SB 5056 to restore people's voting rights once they're released from prison. Allen, who'd been incarcerated for 17 years expressed his frustration with the fact that there is nothing that one learns in prison that is useful in the outside world. There is a code of silence in prison that is enforced by disenfranchisement that he called a "civic death". Cartagena made an appoint to respond to Governor Murphy's claim that New Jersey was a leading state



saying that with already 17 states having enfranchised probationers and parolees, doing so at this point would not make New Jersey a leader, but embracing S2100 as is and ending felony disenfranchisement entirely would support that claim. Murphy was no longer in the room, but the message was clear. New Jersey has a unique and timely opportunity that many states with closed sessions do not and the legislature should capitalize on it. New Jersey can be a leader as the first state to restore prisoners voting rights in American history (Maine & Vermont never took away prisoners voting rights) and end felony disenfranchisement that was imposed in 1844.

## How Do We Engage Conservative Perspectives?

The Brennan Center gave activists, organizers, politicians and elected officials the unique opportunity to come together and discuss one of the most critical political issues of our time, a conversation that was not even considered even five years ago. There was a meeting of the minds between conservatives, liberals and abolitionists in the shared space that built collaborative relationships within this New Suffrage Movement. One of the most significant takeaways was a new understanding in the way that support is shaped from the conservative perspective. Rizer, a former prosecutor, police officer and member of the Conservative Libertarian Movement expressed his frustration with the fact that disenfranchisement makes us less safe as a society. Constitution embracing right-wingers can recognize the the unconstitutionality of felony disenfranchisement. They also understand that when formally incarcerated people are further marginalized civilly, they're more likely to engage in crime. With regret Rizer shared that during both his 9 years as a prosecutor and 20+ years as a police officer he never once visited a prison. Like he, many working on the prosecution side never see the consequences of their decisions at any point during their career. There is a dangerous disconnect between those who inflict the pain of prosecution and those who are forced to endure it.

Along with this, I also valued the perspective Pastor Liske shared with his own failure as a leader in the faith community to the injustices of incarceration. Liske did not feel the need to participate as an activist until his own nephew was incarcerated. It was then that he began to mobilize communities of faith including Christian, Catholic and Muslim houses of worship, against the prison industrial complex. Liske's story is one that I hear often from people who have the privilege of ignoring mass incarceration until it hits home. It's a sad reality that many choose to turn a blind eye to mass injustices that they're aware of just because they aren't directly impacted. "The spark of divine is in every individual" Liske said and that is a source of dignity that we should not deny any person, regardless of their conviction. It shouldn't take being swept up by the system or a loved one being held captive in order to want to fight against it's injustices.



This monster that we fight will continue to destroy more lives so if being abused by it is what it takes for some to get involved, then the movement will continue to grow regardless. I urge people to get involved before it happens to you. Join the New Suffrage Movement, support the end of felony disenfranchisement and restore our democracy.

#DemocracyNeedsEveryone—

# LEGISLATION UPDATE

BILL | POLICY | CAMPAIGN

## Criminal Justice Reforms are Being Served, Who's Cooking What? Biden vs. Bernie

Amani Sawari August 18, 2019 | [www.sawarimi.org](http://www.sawarimi.org)



This summer multiple candidates have rolled out comprehensive plans to reform America's desperately ineffective, overcrowded Criminal Justice system. For decades prisoners, their families, allies and advocating organizations have been pleading with officials to make Criminal Justice Reform a national priority. Until the current race there hasn't been a presidential candidate willing to make transformative reforms apart of their platform. Last month right before the second round of debates in Detroit, Joe Biden introduced a Criminal Justice Reform proposal that shocked many, as he was an outspoken champion for the 94 Crime "Biden" bills that ushered in the era of mass incarceration.

Biden, is now beginning to understand that his role in the mass incarceration era has to be reconciled in order for him to secure the presidency and especially the black vote. Booker, as an outspoken advocate, was the first 2020 presidential candidate to present a criminal justice reform proposal to the public. Booker's proposal focused on ending life sentences and pardoning aging and elderly prisoners who've served long sentences. Biden followed Booker with a surprisingly more inclusive plan in July. Bernie who has been pretty vocal about prisoners human rights, was not far behind them putting out a sweepingly comprehensive proposal of his own. I'm not covering Bookers bill in depth because his First Step Act already includes legislation that pardons elderly prisoners through which the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights & Urban Affairs, in partnership with FAMM and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers are currently running a compassionate release program.

### **Joe Biden**

Joe Biden, due to his history as a tough on crime politician, was forced to attempt to rectify his wrongs in an effort to show that his mindset as it relates to criminal justice system has changed. His proposal aims to encourage states to reduce crime, and thereby incarceration, by appropriating \$20 billion towards a program that would eliminate the death penalty, eliminate mandatory minimums for nonviolent crimes pushing many inmates to alternative forms of rehabilitation. Biden also proposes reeling back punitive drug

laws by decriminalizing marijuana use at a federal level with the hopes of states following in those footsteps. Along with the \$20 billion grant, Biden also proposes another spending allocating another \$300 billion to police departments in an attempt to incentivize community focused policing as a part of the community oriented policing services (COPS) program. While this sounds beneficial, police departments don't need more money in order to be more equipped to manage their communities. Police departments need a significant change in the way that their officials view the members in their communities that they are supposed to protect, rather than monitor and mistreat, so that they better serve those communities. Finally, Biden's proposal depends heavily on the use of presidential pardons and clemency. While it is great to see a candidate voice their commitment to exercise their clemency power, this isn't a significant reform, especially without some type of target number. Clemency is an act of presidential executive power assuming that the correction system works for the majority of people. Clemency is a solution for those who are failed by a criminal justice system due to some rare oversight. In contrast, our criminal justice system's failure is not at all rare, it is sweeping and normalized due to the policies that Biden created as a Senator.

The failure of our criminal justice system is built into the way that it functions so while the use of clemency is welcome, it is a ridiculous point to add to a Criminal Justice Reform policy proposal, especially for the author of the bills that got America into this situation. These bills include the Comprehensive Control Act of 1984 that authorized police seizure of innocent people's property that was led by Biden. There's also the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1968 that set radicalized disparities on sentences for crack and cocaine that was sponsored and co-written by Biden. That was followed by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 that was co-sponsored by Biden which dramatically lengthen sentences for drug possession. Finally, the famous Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, "Biden Bills" of 1994 that was also written by Biden which allocated more money to prisons without improving prison conditions while also imposing tougher sentences. These are not at all comprehensively addressed by Biden's current proposal. I don't believe that Biden's mindset has changed at all and anyone who somehow swayed by the current proposal will find themselves back on the other side of the fence after looking over Biden's history.

### **Bernie Sanders**

Earlier this year Bernie was very vocal about his commitment to the human rights of incarcerated citizens by endorsing prisoners' right to vote. Bernie's Criminal Justice Reform proposal covers a much wider variety of issues and goes into more depth than that of his counterparts. Rather than being dependent on case-by-case pardons, Bernie's plan includes structural changes that would restructure many aspects of the criminal justice system, including prison slavery that our system thrive on. These plans include abolishing all private prisons and the use of cash bail.

Many impacted families are from low-income impoverished areas and in an attempt to serve these communities, Bernie proposes that all phone calls and video calls would be free which would put predatory companies like JPay and GTL out of business and strengthen those familial bonds that assist prisoners in their rehabilitation. Eliminating profits would also remove fees from costly reentry programs like charges to ex-felons for ankle monitoring software so Jay Z should change his investment plans soon.

Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals often suffer from labor exploitation or employment discrimination. Bernie's plan would address this by mandating that prisoners be paid living wages for their work while incarcerated, putting an end to prison slavery as we know it today. This would result in companies with ill intentions of exploiting prisoners labor to pull out of the prison industry and remove contracts that warrant high prison populations in order to guarantee a labor pool. This would also help prisoners support themselves and their families during their incarceration, as well as save funds while accruing valuable skills to use once they're released.

Looking at the pre-trial options, Bernie's plan includes increased funding for public defenders, the legal expertise that many the vast majority of those in prison depended on in trial. Public defenders who are overworked and grossly underpaid are completely unable to provide adequate legal help which effectively a violation of citizens' sixth amendment rights. The proposal goes on to emphasize an end to mass incarceration and excessive sentencing by transforming policing by adding a team of unarmed first responders that would limit the number of deaths that occur due to police officers personal biases. It would also restrict the use of immunity used by officers and establish a national registry for deaths by police of civilians and corrections officers of prisoners.

Finally, along with abolishing private prisons, Bernie's plan also includes abolishing three-strike laws and mandatory minimums. The abolition of mandatory minimums would allow all prisoners to earn time off of their sentence for their efforts in rehabilitation and would not require that every person be judged today, not based off of who they were decades ago, but who they are making an effort to become. This type of restructuring plan gives prisoners not only space to develop into who they wish to become but it also gives them and their families the hope that they desperately need to overcome.

### **Would you rather a snack or a meal?**

There are several key differences between these candidates proposals. Biden's focuses on providing increased funding to a failed system while Bernie's proposal lists out a comprehensive plan to restructure a failing system. Biden's plan would be ok if he wasn't the author Mass Incarcerator, but with his history he doesn't offer much if any reconciliation for the devastation he's caused. Bernie takes it a step further, working with grassroots organizers like myself to develop a plan that actually addresses the needs of the people. Biden just falls short at every turn, for example, Biden's proposal restricts the elimination of mandatory minimums to nonviolent offenders while Bernie's includes all offenders. It is critical that all of these reforms include all offenders. It's time that we stop using nonviolent vs. violent labels that divide prison populations on already biased sentences. There are many offenders with violent sentences that are reformed and ready to go home. We cannot afford to use labels to create unnecessary cutouts among people who are in desperate need of change. In another comparison we see that like Biden, Bernie plans to decriminalize the use of marijuana, but in addition

Bernie's plan goes beyond Biden by committing to eliminating solitary confinement which has been proven as a form of torture, an excessive punishment that violates universal human rights. Most notably Bernie's plan includes the establishment of a Prisoners Bill of Rights. This is an extraordinary task that I hope prisoners will have the chance to be involved in developing. For centuries as inhabitants of the new Jim Crow, according to the thirteenth amendment, prisoners are regarded as slaves by our government. By assigning them with specific unalienable rights like the right to vote and the right to take judicial proceedings against abuse, prisoners rights of citizenship are strengthened and they are protected as citizens while serving their sentences. These protections established by a Bill of Rights create safer environments that enable prisoners to focus on their rehabilitation rather than be engrossed by conflicts between one another and staff. The divisions that occur within prison are due to prisoners lacking protection over their basic rights as humans, resulting in tense and violent atmospheres that are completely inadequate for rehabilitation.

### **Final thoughts: Hungry for a full Meal**

Earlier this year Bernie was very vocal about his commitment to the human rights of incarcerated citizens with his endorsement of prisoners right to vote, this continues to be one of his campaign promises. At that time we all began to pay attention to how Bernie would develop as a candidate in response to the needs of Criminal Justice Reform advocates, prisoners, their families and allies. Knowing that there are over 2.2 million people in prison and 2.7 million children of incarcerated parents, there are millions of people who are directly impacted by our failure of a criminal justice system. Any candidate who boldly takes on the task of tackling the very complex issues that exist in the system, is one that deserves to be heard and that definitely has our attention. Though Booker has been the most vocal about the need for reform his plan was not at all comprehensive. Biden's proposal upon initial observation was not impressive enough for me to forgive him for his leading role in the 80s and 90s that exploded prison populations and devastated families, especially those in impoverished communities of color. What Biden calls reform depends too much on his personal judgment to granting clemency and I don't trust his personal judgment based upon his history. Biden often attempts to belittle his work of passing those destining crime bills being a "Long long time ago" but there are people that have been in prison since and those are the people that need direct and immediate action in their lives. We need a president that will serve those citizens that were run over and slaughtered by Biden's Bills.

Rather than Biden being the candidate to provide such relief to his victims of over sentencing, over charging and over crowding; Bernie stepped in by answering the call. Thousands of individuals risked their lives this time last year during the National Prison Strike to raise awareness about the detrimental conditions of our nation's prisons. This time last year, during this historic month of Black August, prisoners participated in the National Prison Strike that spanned across the Nation in 17 States and touched the entire world from Palestinian prisoners held captive in Israel to prisoners at Larissa Prison in Greece. The world is watching and we've failed grossly during the mass incarceration era. Our country continues to fail with severely high prison populations. The free continues to hold the record for the most enslaved people, the majority held captive in inhumane conditions all over this country.

The end of the mass incarceration era must begin with a decarceration era, we cannot settle for a presidential candidate who is not ready to lead a decarceration era Decarceration requires

getting masses of deserving and capable people out of prison to return to the families who love and need them. Surprisingly we began to see that under this administration with the First Step Act that's related thousands from Federal prisons, but this only effects a small percentage of prisoners. Now we need more than a second step we need the full throttle package bursting at the seams of reformatory policies that will build up into a complete transformation. I refuse to accept anything less and at this point Bernie has me very impressed. Now that this has become a main presidential campaign issue I look forward to seeing what proposals other candidates release in competition. —

## Opinion: Disenfranchising felons hurts Georgians

Sarah Totonchi July 27, 2019 | [www.ajc.com](http://www.ajc.com)

In 2016, over 6 million Americans were denied the right to participate in our democracy because of a prior felony conviction. That same year in Georgia, an estimated quarter-million people were barred from voting, despite that the majority had completed their sentences and were living and working in their communities again. Research suggests people who actively engage in the democratic process are more likely to adopt the shared values of their broader community, and that felony disenfranchisement increases recidivism.

Under the leadership of Gov. Nathan Deal and many others, Georgia has become a state that believes in second chances and embraces redemption. Yet we have not addressed the reality that we continue to exclude and punish Georgians by denying the right to vote to people convicted of all felony offenses. This year, a bipartisan group of state senators will convene to revise the list of disqualifying felonies and determine how to expand voting rights to certain people convicted of non-violent felonies.

Georgia's Constitution bans anyone from voting who is completing a sentence for a felony involving moral turpitude (completing a sentence includes those on probation or parole). The state has not created a list of crimes defined as those involving "moral turpitude," which means that in practice, every person currently serving a felony sentence in Georgia is disenfranchised, including people convicted of drug possession and theft.

Worse is that outstanding fines, fees and other financial obligations prevent sentence completion, meaning that these debts are essentially modern-day poll taxes that keep otherwise eligible Georgians from voting. Georgia also has the dubious distinction of having the highest number of people on probation or parole in the country. As of 2016, there were 410,964 people on probation in Georgia. One in 13 are under some form of correctional control. People on probation in Georgia. One in 13 are under some form of correctional control.

Stripping people of their right to vote is one of the last vestiges of a concept called Civil Death, a product of English common law that traveled across the Atlantic with British colonizers. The concept was straightforward: if you were convicted of felony offenses, you were deprived of your rights under the law. The concept is strikingly medieval, so it's not surprising that Civil Death had largely disappeared from the United States by the mid-20th century. There was just one glaring exception: felony disenfranchisement.

In the post-Reconstruction period, as poll taxes and literacy tests were weaponized in an attempt to keep Black Americans from voting, a number of Southern states, including Georgia, moved to further codify felony disenfranchisement. This was done by targeting offenses which they believed Black people could be successfully prosecuted for and ensuring that a conviction for any of those offenses would result in permanent disenfranchisement.

In Alabama, for example, the author of the state's disenfranchisement provision "estimated the crime of wife-beating alone would disqualify 60 percent of the Negroes," resulting in the final policy, under which a man would be disenfranchised for beating his wife, but not for murdering her.

The impact of the racist underpinnings of felony disenfranchisement has been devastating: more than 2.2 million Black Americans are disenfranchised today, or roughly 7.4% of the black adult population. For non-blacks, that number is 1.8 %.

More than three-quarters of the millions of disenfranchised Americans are now free and living and working again in their communities. They're people like Leon Brown, who is entrusted with driving a tractor-trailer in the Savannah seaport — one of the busiest in the world — yet not entrusted with the right to vote. "I would like to vote," Mr. Brown told the Associated Press. "I go off and do the time, come back out and they hold me hostage again because I'm on probation."

If the goal of our criminal justice system is indeed to promote public safety, rehabilitate people convicted of crimes, and support people as they return home to their communities, there is simply no justification for continuing to deny someone the right to participate in the democratic process. Felony disenfranchisement serves only to further alienate and penalize formerly incarcerated people — who already face a myriad of challenges returning to their communities — and it weakens our democracy.

Restoring the right to vote is in alignment with our belief in redemption and rehabilitation, and it is a natural next step for criminal justice reform in Georgia. It is in our best interests to engage formerly incarcerated people in productive, meaningful relationships with their communities. Restoring the right to participate in shaping that community is one of the most powerful ways to do so.—

**KONCENTRATION  
KAMP KHRONICLES**  
ANALYSIS | NARRATIVE | POETRY

# The Prisoner's Lament

They want me to be non-violent,  
And surround me with violence.

They want me to make better choices,  
And remove all meaningful choice.

They want me to respect the law,  
And entangle me in petty rules,  
arbitrarily enforced.

They want me to stop being hard,  
And put me where only toughness is respected.

They want me to be responsible,  
And take away all my responsibility.

And then they blame ME  
If my behavior doesn't change.

Effective correction is motivated  
By Love, not fear.

-Anonymous

# Monthly Captured Moments



(left) Left to Right: Dennis Boatwright, Willis X, Kevin (NY BPP), Amani Sawari and Kansas City IWOC rep on August 23, 2019



(right) Left to Right: Amani Sawari and Darren Mack of Just Leadership USA meet in New York City on September 11, 2019



(left) Left to Right: Dennis Boatwright with U.S. Congressperson Rashida Talib (MI) and Amani Sawari at Talib's Town Hall in Michigan on August 29, 2019



(right) Left to Right: Sharwanna Vaughn and Amani Sawari meet for breakfast in Brooklyn, NY on September 13, 2019

## Call for Content

In addition to publishing content raising awareness about the Right2Vote Campaign and its initiatives, the Right2Vote Report accepts work from prisoners in the form of articles, art and poetry as well as the contribution of stamps. We also work with other nonprofits and organizers to amplify your voices. This publication and its campaign are about you and our most meaningful contributions come from the inside. For readers interested in submitting their work: typed and printed can be sent to the return address or emailed to: amanisawari@gmail.com. Please write your address onto the back of your submission.

### Artwork for Right2Vote Campaign

Right2Vote is a multi-year campaign that is dependant on providing information and re-educating the masses on the importance of protecting the voting rights of all citizens within a democracy, regardless of their conviction status. Our campaign is seeking contributions from incarcerated supporters in the form of artwork or testimonials that speak to why it is important for prisoners to have their voting rights restored. We plan on using all submissions in a variety of promotional materials that include videos, articles, pamphlets, t-shirts, buttons, graphics and more. If there is a phrase, statement or drawing that you'd like to share please forward to their return address. For all interested participants, please include your signature on your artwork/submission.

### University of Chicago Student seeks Interviews

Taylor Fox is a college senior studying Political Science at the University of Chicago. She is conducting research on contemporary U.S. prison labor struggles and is hoping to interview formerly incarcerated folks involved with this work. Taylor started this project because she thinks in order to envision a world without prisons, we must envision a world without slavery. She knows she can't do this topic justice without centering the voices of people most impacted and involved.

Please contact her at (631) 806-8170 or taylorfox@uchicago.edu if you're interested in participating in an approximately one hour interview. And if you have any friends who organize or struggle against prison labor (or have at some point), she would love to talk with them too. Feel free to reach out to Taylor with any questions (she'd love to talk about this project more!) at the contact information listed above.

Sawarimi does not provide legal services, but happily forwards requests for legal representation to partners at the National Lawyers' Guild. Sawarimi is a platform of expression and empowerment for disentrenched and marginalized groups, especially members of the African diaspora. Amani Sawari is a writer, founder of Sawarimi and SawariMedia, spokesperson for Jailhouse Lawyers Speak and National Coordinator of their Right2Vote Campaign with the support of the Roddenberry Foundation. Download and print issues of the Right2Vote Report for distribution at <http://sawarimi.org/right2vote-report>

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By Seliinda Guerrero and artist Micah Bazant

### National Progress to Ending Felony Disenfranchisement

